

JUSTIFICATION FOR A COURSE IN
REMEDIAL READING AND COMPREHENSION IN THE US ARMY
CHAPLAIN SCHOOL

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Among children tested by the psychiatric clinic of the Children's Court in the city of New York, seventy-six per cent were found to be two or more years retarded in reading. More than half of the children tested were five years or more retarded. These testing may not prove that the causes of delinquency are connected to a child not being able to read well but it does show that there is a strong tendency for the two to go hand in hand. Let us say that even if a poor reader does avoid delinquency at sometime in his life he will suffer the frustrations of years of unsuccessful effort and invidious comparisons with others who are excellent readers and this in itself may be a factor which will interfere with a normal, happy life.

It is not easy for most of us to draw implications from the above statements so let us carry the matter a little farther. During World War II thousands of men drafted as soldiers were unable to meet the Army's minimum literacy standard, which was placed at only the fourth grade level. To reduce this tremendous waste of manpower the armed forces created special training units in which thousands of illiterate draftees were taught within an eighteen week period to read, write and do simple arithmetic. This was done because the illiterate soldier was as useless to the Army as one who was blind, deaf or crippled.

Today our schools and colleges are realizing the need for courses in remedial reading for they recognize that students cannot do the proper amount of reading required of them. The emphasis in the old days of Colonial America was on learning to read. We later began

to place the emphasis on reading to learn. Whichever comes first our institutions of learning are awakening to the fact that many of their students do not read well enough at all. Where formally in our schools a student was required to read one book, now it is many. The need for better and faster reading is paramount.

The matter of reading improvement has been approached scientifically in schools that have adopted Remedial Reading and Comprehension as a part of their curriculum. One of the machines used in such courses is the Ophthalmograph. This is a machine that checks the eyes as they move while reading. In using this machine a paragraph is read and the eyes are photographed as they read, recording the fixations the eyes make on 35mm film. The camera photographs the cornea of the eye and records each movement as the eye crosses the page. From the number of fixations and other factors it can be determined how many words a minute the student reads. During the course the student is checked several times with this machine and the factors known are the number of eye stops or fixations, the average span of recognitions, the reading rate and thus the reading speed.

Another machine for use in reading is the Tachistoscope, a slide projector equipped with a special lens^R which permits projection of a picture for a fraction of a second. On each slide which appears is a number of five to seven digits. As the number flashes on the screen for an instant the student strives to grasp all the digits so they can be remembered. The benefits derived from this machine by the student increase the utilization of the peripheral vision (scope of recognition) with a resulting decrease in the time he must look at a word in order to grasp its meaning. We call this the "Fixation period". Part of

the key to faster reading is a short fixation period before moving to the next word.

An additional machine use in reading improvement is the Reading Rate Controller which is used extensively in the reading laboratory. It is a simple machine and one is provided for each student to study with. In the machine is placed a single page from a normal-sized book. As one reads a sliding panel begins to descend downward to motivate the student to read faster to stay ahead of the sliding panel and not regress. The object is to keep ahead of the sliding panel and thus practice reading faster. This machine helps to increase the span of recognition, eliminate regressions (because the sliding panel prevents the student from going back to read a sentence twice), to assist the student in decreasing his fixations time and let the student know his rate of progress in reading.

A course in Remedial Reading and Comprehension where these machines are used to test the progress and increase the speed of the student is being taught in the US Army Information School in Fort Slocum, New York. Startling results have been seen by those who take the course. and it is not at all uncommon for those who take the course to find that after twenty lessons the reading rate has increased from perhaps four hundred words per minute to over one thousand words per minute, with even better comprehension and retention than at the slower rate. Not only in the US Army Information School but in many colleges and universities such a course is being offered. although from the writer's experience none is better equipped than the Information School. It is most important to point out that students taking such courses

can easily learn to read with greater speed, increased understanding and with heightened responsiveness and an over-all efficiency that is hardly believable.

Despite the challenges we have in our modern world from the movies, television and radio, there is no doubt that reading is here to stay. Our society is a reading society in which enormous quantities of reading matter are consumed. Americans read newspapers, magazines, books, trade papers, forms, stories, biography, history, travel posters, science and how-to-do-it books to mention only a few types. From reading material people gain much of their basis for their way of life and habits. We read to acquire knowledge, to achieve recreation or emotional stimulation, and to build attitudes and solve problems.

More reading is done today than ever before despite other media of learning and informing oneself. It may not be a good sign that comic books sell at the rate of about seventy million copies a month. On the other hand more worth-while books and reading is being circulated in much larger quantities than ever before. Book clubs and and printing of inexpensive paper-bound editions have brought the sales of better literature to a tremendous output. The combined circulation of all magazines in the United States and Canada is now more than one hundred seventy million copies per issue and in the two countries combined many magazines run more than a million copies per issue.

As compared to movies, radio and television, reading has certain advantages. Instead of having to choose from a limited variety of material offered at a given time by sponsors and advertisers or from the currently available movies, the reader can select from the finest

writings of his age or the past at will. He can read in almost any place at the time of his own choosing and convenience. He can stop for an intermission when he desires, pause, re-read as he pleases. The flexibility of reading insures its continuing value both for education and sheer enjoyment.

The advantages of good reading and reading properly can be had by most anyone. Skillful reading and good scholarship go hand in hand. Good students are usually good readers and it has been proven that those who are good readers tend to achieve in general more success in life. There is more joy in life for the good reader. To read easily and with good comprehension about the great events of the past, the discovery of America, as an example or the invention of the airplane, the splitting of the atom, is to "rub elbows" with kings and princes, presidents and kings, the scientist and explorer and is indeed a rare experience.

Good reading helps one to become the persons he wishes to become; well adjusted, socially liked, well informed and more interesting to those about him. Through extensive reading of books and magazines as well as the daily newspaper we can extend our interests and improve our abilities. We can master skills, acquire new habits and in many ways attain successful living. We can learn to understand others better and to get along with people. Because we are all human, we desire social recognition and the approval of others, especially those we meet every day. We will likely win more respect and friendship if we are well read, for it has been

proven that those who read much and well are the most interesting people to be around. In a real sense the man of distinction is a well-read person wherever he is. One of our greatest educators has said that the four great master builders of our nation, Hamilton, Jefferson, Adams and Madison were probably some of the most widely read men of their age. There is no question that our nation received much from their guidance.

One of the greatest modern physicians was Sir William Osler, a teacher in Johns Hopkins Medical School. Many of the outstanding texts used by doctors today were written by him and many of our good ²⁹psychiatrists were his students. Sir Osler was also noted for a broad education and interest in many fields besides medicine, for he was a very cultured man. He was interested in what men have done through the ages. He had a busy schedule as a specialist and research doctor. There was really no time in his twenty-four hour schedule of work that he could call his own except for a few hours of sleep, meals and bodily functions. However, in his lifetime he devoted each evening a quarter of hour to reading, a habit he never broke. It is estimated that in this way he read libraries full of books. He became an authority on many subjects. Interestingly enough here was a man who answered the question "How³⁰ can I find time to read?". His ability to read rapidly and comprehend quickly were foremost factors in this achievement.

The aim of this paper is to show how the United States Army Chaplain can learn to read faster and better and profit from it. Anyone who knows the profession of the Army Chaplain knows he is a very busy man. Few Chaplains can really say that they ever finish their work. The personnel

of the Chaplain's Unit demand time for counselling. Sermons and services must be prepared. Character Guidance periods of instruction must be prepared and presented, as often as twenty-five times a month for some Chaplains. He is expected to attend functions held by the Commanding Officer and by civic and military organizations and to carry on in dozens of daily activities which leave him practically no time. He finds little time for personal enrichment in reading although he may promise himself he will take time out for this and with good intention buy a best seller book. All too often he never finds the time to read with too many urgent emergency calls.

The matter of time is such an important element in the Chaplain's schedule. If he takes up the daily newspaper it demands time to read it. The prose of some of our larger Sunday editions add up to some eight million words exclusive of the advertising material. A weekly journal may have well over one hundred thousand words and a professional magazine approximately fifty thousand words. We could not expect anyone to read every bit of material in these publications but the Chaplain must read a great deal to be a well-informed spiritual leader and military officer.

It is apparent if the Chaplain could read faster and with more comprehension he would do more reading and have time left for other activities. Even an Army Regulation, which in some cases, according to the subject matter, must be read by the Chaplain, takes a tremendous amount of time and requires a great deal of background and skill for proper understanding.

The average book varies in length from sixty thousand to one hundred thousand words. In one year twenty such books can be read by the average reader in just fifteen minutes a day. But the average person has a

greater potential than that. Studies in the field of reading improvement show that no matter how well our reading is at present we could improve it greatly, increase the speed by doubling it and improve comprehension and retention. Sometime ago a group of professional men increased comprehension from seventy-one to seventy-two percent and the speed from two hundred fifty to four hundred twenty five words a minute in a few lessons. Officers who attended a course in Remedial Reading offered in the US Army Information School have increased in rapidity from about three hundred fifty words to over one thousand words per minute.

We are in a period of emphasis on career management for the Army Chaplains in the United States Army. Those who have productive years ahead of them and have shown possibilities are being sent to schools for the very best training to prepare themselves for leadership in any situation they may be called to serve in in future years. It is possible for the Chaplain to attend three different courses as the US Army Chaplain School in Fort Slocum, New York. The first course is the basic course, two months in duration; the second, the Company Officer Grade Course, twelve weeks in duration and the third, the Advanced Course, of seventeen weeks duration. A course in Remedial Reading offered in any of these courses would make the Chaplain more effective by far, not only as a student pursuing his courses but on the field in his daily endeavors. It is noted that there is no age limit barrier to learning to read better. The older, more mature Chaplains of the Advanced Course could profit as well as the younger ones who attend the Basic Courses.

The Army Chaplain, in order to be a spiritual leader who can motivate his people, must be a good reader. The average Chaplain is far too limited

in his reading material, largely because he lacks time. He needs to develop a balanced reading program, reading a variety of books, magazine articles and Newspapers on a variety of subjects. He needs to read more in his professional field to find spiritual enrichment and growth. Here are some of the goals that could be realized in a Course in Remedial Reading and Comprehension:

- Read for a purpose and adapt that purpose to reading.
- Read faster and without loss of comprehension.
- Learn to skim for general impression or specific facts.
- To find quickly the main idea.
- To do careful reading at time for understanding and recall.
- To evaluate quickly what is being read.
- To learn to appreciate more kinds of creative reading.
- To build and improve the vocabulary.
- To learn to locate and use reading materials.

The United States Army Chaplain School and the United States Army Information School are both presently located on the same site at Fort Slocum, New York. The Army Information School is offering courses in this field to its students. The course consists of twenty-one hours of work in the reading laboratory. The school has the necessary equipment to teach student Chaplains of any grade or level.

The Army Chaplain has no opportunity at any other place or time to enroll in such a course. Several years usually intervene between his three courses at the Chaplain School. Courses at the Chaplain School are accelerated and much reading is required. To add a course in the curriculum that would aid him in reading faster and better would result in immediate increased efficiency in the courses in school and prove of untold value to the Chaplain on his return to his assignment. In short it would make him a more efficient Chaplain.

Therefore, since more than an adequate justification has been presented for the addition of a course in Remedial Reading and Comprehension at the US Army Chaplain School, it is recommended that considerations be given for its accomplishment.

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